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## AGRICULTURAL POLITICS IN ENGLAND.

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ALTHOUGH the agricultural depression which has prevailed in England with great severity since 1878 has been to some extent relieved by a good harvest for all crops except wheat, it would be idle to expect any speedy revival of confidence in the prosperity of English agriculture, which has been under a cloud for about fourteen years. Since the great harvest of 1868 there has been only one first-rate wheat crop—in 1874; and in only three other years has the crop approximated to an average—in 1870, 1878, and 1882. Barley has been a fair or good crop in seven years out of the fourteen; but in 1882, like all other crops, it was seriously injured in quality by the extremely wet harvest. No other crop can show as good a record as that of barley. The seven years ending with 1881, however, made up the most disastrous cycle which English agriculture has endured in recent times, the worst year of all being 1879, which completed the ruin of thousands of farmers. Estimates collected from a large number of farmers residing in every county in England, and published in the “Mark Lane Express,” show the estimated average yield, in bushels, of the principal crops for the seven years referred to, as compared with a normal average yield; and to these figures I have added the estimates for 1883:

	<i>Wheat.</i>	<i>Barley.</i>	<i>Oats.</i>	<i>Beans.</i>	<i>Peas.</i>
Seven years ending with 1881 ..	24.66	31.00	39.17	25.75	24.75
Normal average .....	29.05	35.05	43.03	30.08	28.09
Harvest 1883 .....	26.04	35.04	43.06	32.04	28.07

It will be understood that these figures are all averages of estimates, and we have no official returns upon the yield of crops in England; but they are averages of a large number of estimates made by the most competent men, and they may be taken as approximately correct. They give some indication of the

losses suffered by English farmers through unfavorable seasons. For the greater portion of the period, too, prices of grain have been low. The average price of wheat in 1879 was 46s.; in 1880, 44s.; in 1881, 46s. 11d.; in 1882, 41s. 10d.; in 1883 the highest weekly average has been 43s. 10d., and the average for the year can scarcely be more than that of 1882. Yet this is a year in which the world's production of wheat is supposed to be less than a year's consumption, and the prospect of higher prices in the near future, therefore, is not encouraging. Barley has been low in price since the repeal of the malt tax, partly because so many substances are used instead of barley malt in the manufacture of beer, and partly because the spread of the temperance movement has diminished the consumption of alcoholic beverages. Here, again, there is no reasonable expectation of a return of such high prices as formerly prevailed more or less frequently in different periods. The highest weekly average price in 1883 was 35s. per quarter, and in one week the average was as low as 25s. 6d. Under existing conditions, farmers in England cannot grow wheat and barley with profit at such prices as those given above, and the question is, What are they to do in order to make their farms pay? The bearing of agricultural politics upon this question will be presently stated; but first it is desirable to refer to other difficulties of the English farmer's position in addition to poor crops and low prices.

It may seem to those not well acquainted with all the conditions of English farming that the question at issue is simply one of rent adjustment; but that this is not the case is proved by the fact that at the present time there are thousands of acres of corn-growing land which tenants could scarcely be induced to take rent free. An official return of the unoccupied farms in 1881 gives the total area of unoccupied land in England and Wales as 43,817 acres; but this did not include the acreage of farms cultivated by landlords unable to find tenants, a very much larger quantity than that named above, which only includes farms left entirely uncultivated. Since 1879, rents for new hirings have gone down from twenty to fifty per cent.; but the reduction has only been made, as a rule, after previous tenants had been ruined. Permanent reductions, where tenants have managed to struggle on, have been few, though temporary remissions of from ten to fifty per cent. have been common. From the Income Tax Returns it appears that in the quarter century ending with 1876 agricult-

ural rents in the United Kingdom increased by forty per cent., and to meet the times at least that proportion requires to be taken off all rents that have not been already permanently reduced. But landlords naturally prefer to keep up the nominal amount of their rental, and to let their tenants off the payment of a portion of the sum in bad seasons only. In the current cereal year, as the general harvest was a good one, few if any remissions probably will be made, and farmers will struggle on till another bad season ruins many of them. By quitting their farms, they could get others at much lower rents; but, apart from their attachment to their homes and the fear of not doing well with strange farms, many of them are in debt to their landlords, and others are in so delicate a financial position that they dare not face the general settling-up involved in a flitting. Sooner or later there must be an end to this embarrassing state of affairs; for unless the conditions of farming are altered or rents are permanently reduced,—and both are necessary in very many instances,—the ruin of the tenants who are in the position described cannot be far off. The full intensity of the dilemma with respect to rent, however, has yet to be stated. Landlords have power to absorb in rent not only any benefit that arises at any time from higher prices of agricultural produce or from a run of prolific seasons, but also any advantages that may arise from the expenditure or skill of their tenants. The better a man farms the higher rent he pays, as a rule. This point is connected with the law of landlord and tenant, which will be referred to hereafter. The Law of Distress has had a great influence in forcing up rents; for, by giving to the landlord a preference claim over all other creditors of the farmer, it enables him with safety to accept as a tenant any man who offers a high rent, although the man may not have half enough capital to enable him to farm the land properly. If a tenant fails, the landlord is almost invariably safe, as he can seize by distraint whatever property there may be on the farm, and until his claim is fully satisfied no other creditor can take a penny.

In their awkward position, farmers of arable land have no lack of advisers. If corn-growing does not pay, they are told to lay their land down in permanent pasture and breed live stock or engage in dairy farming; or to grow fruit or vegetables. Permanent pasture is increasing in the country gradually and slowly. The desirability of its more rapid increase is doubtful,

as it involves less produce from the land and diminished employment of labor; but, apart from that, there are obstacles in the way. In the first place, a great deal of the best wheat land is not suited for permanent pasture; and, secondly, the making of pasture is costly work, for the expense of which tenants have no security. Dairy-farming is the most profitable branch of agriculture at the present time, and it seems likely to remain so. There is an ever-increasing demand for milk and butter, and cheese has sold well since American makers ceased to flood our markets at prices which they found unremunerative. Sheep-breeding, again, has paid well for some time, in spite of the low price of wool. With very little increase of pasture, dairy-farming, breeding, and meat-producing, might be greatly extended, especially if the system of ensilage, now being tried in all parts of the country, turns out to be as successful as it seems likely to be. But here we not only come back to the old deadlock — the want of security for tenants' capital; we also have to face a fresh difficulty — the frequent losses caused by cattle disease. Again, the keeping of a large number of cattle or sheep means a great outlay of capital, a consequent improvement in the land hired, and serious risk of loss from disease. As for fruit-farming, its encouragement is most desirable for both producers and consumers; but scarcely any one has a sufficient inducement to undertake the costly work of planting. Landowners are, for the most part, merely life tenants of their estates, and therefore have no interest in improving the land by sinking capital in it; while tenants, many of whom would be glad to grow fruit, have no security for the necessary outlay. Nor is this all, for an abominable impost, called Extraordinary Tithe, is levied by the Church upon every acre of land cropped with fruit or hops. This impost, varying from 3s. 6d. to 18s. per acre, is charged in addition to the ordinary tithe on the same land, usually about 7s. per acre in the fruit districts of Kent. The ordinary tithe rent-charge is in reality paid by landlords, apart from any increase that may occur between one adjustment of rent and the next; and at the present time the amount of the rent-charge, which varies in proportion to the average price of grain, is falling. But the extraordinary tithe is a direct tax upon the enterprise of the farmer, as it is imposed upon any land newly planted with fruit or hops, and ceases when these crops are no longer grown on that land. At the present time the farmers of

Kent are resisting the collection of this impost, refusing in many instances to pay it, and forcing the clergy to distrain upon their property in order to obtain the amounts demanded.

The present system of assessing land for taxation purposes is another impediment to agricultural improvement. The better the farmer, the higher his rates, as well as his rent, is the rule. If either landlord or tenant increases the value of a farm, by building upon it or otherwise improving it, the assessment for poor rates and other taxes is put up, although the improver may not have realized a farthing of profit upon his outlay. This causes indignation, and greatly hinders the improvement of land.

In addition to the discouragements to improved farming mentioned above, there are on most estates antiquated and absurd restrictions upon the courses of cropping and the sale of produce. Very many tenants are compelled by their agreements to adopt a particular rotation of cropping, and are forbidden to sell off the farm hay, straw, or roots, or to grow two white-straw crops in succession. In many parts of the country a given quantity of straw, for instance, sells at a price four times the value of the manure that can be made with it; consequently, a farmer could bring back to the land in return for the straw a very large quantity of fertilizing material, in the form of manure or in that of feeding-stuffs, and yet he is not allowed to do this. In many other ways, farmers' hands are tied, and they are prevented from carrying on their business in the most advantageous way. The object is to prevent the exhaustion of the soil; but if farmers were encouraged to improve the land by giving them security for their improvements, and if they were deterred from deteriorating the land by the fear of having to pay damages (which can be recovered for "waste" or deterioration under the law as it stands, but not simply enough), no restrictions upon cropping and sale of produce would be needed.

The destruction of crops by game preserved by landlords is still an intolerable evil on some estates; but it has been greatly mitigated by the action of the Ground Game Act of 1880, under which every tenant, unless prevented by the terms of an unexpired lease of his farm or a sporting lease, has an indefeasible right to kill hares and rabbits. So great is the power of landlords, however, that in many instances tenants are afraid to use their legal powers, especially when they have received a distinct

intimation that if they kill game they will be turned out of their holdings.

It would be difficult to devise a system of laws, customs, and regulations more thoroughly calculated to keep agriculture at a low ebb than that which still exists in Great Britain. As already observed, the land is chiefly in the hands of life tenants, or limited owners, as they are commonly termed, whose interest it is to spend as little upon it as possible. If they are rich men, they are deterred from spending because all the money they invest in their estates is so much added to the already excessive share of their property which will go to their eldest sons or other heirs, and so much subtracted from the shares of their younger children and other relatives. The Settled Land Act of 1882 has given to limited owners powers of sale under certain stringent conditions; but these are not likely to be extensively used, as there is a very strong feeling in favor of keeping up the *status* of a family by preserving the estate intact, however seriously burdened it may be by settlements and mortgages. As for tenants, it has been shown how they are deterred from improving their holdings and deterred or prevented from striking out into some new form of agricultural business. Under such circumstances, it is no wonder that British agriculture will not stand the strain of modern competition in years of average fruitfulness, or that, when a few bad seasons come, farmers are ruined by thousands. With the best markets in the world for agricultural produce, farming paid moderately well in spite of all disadvantages so long as the importation of breadstuffs, meat, and other farm produce, was comparatively small; but now that our markets are flooded with grain from America, India, Australia, Egypt, and other countries, from which we received very little in the days of Protection, either the conditions of farming must be altered, or British agriculture, the best in the world, must permanently decline in efficiency. It is mainly because many of our large landlords temper their legal and personal powers with indulgence, that the ruin of our farmers has not been more general than it has been. Very often the full competition rent of a farm is not demanded, while remissions are allowed in times of distress. Such indulgences, however, are dearly paid for in the forms of game devastation, loss of personal and business independence, and the stifling of all spirited enterprise.

The condition of farm laborers in England, although better than it was twenty years ago, chiefly because they have lately taken to emigration and migration more freely than heretofore, is kept down by the influences which prevent the application of capital and enterprise to the land. Their great grievance, however, is their landless condition, in which respect they are worse off than they were before the great robbery known as the Enclosure of Common Lands was perpetrated. Except in a few parts of the country, it is almost impossible for a farm workman to obtain land either by purchase or on hire. Small allotments, usually of the worst land in the parish, are in some places let at double the rent paid by the large farmers in the same district; but the patches are usually only about a quarter of an acre in extent. What the laborers need is an opportunity, by means of industry and thrift, of obtaining land enough to live on. It is doubtful whether peasant-proprietorship, as a general system, would pay in this country; but a few small farms in every parish, for the production of milk, eggs, poultry, pork, fruit, and vegetables, would certainly pay well, and the best of our farm laborers are well fitted to manage them. Such farms would afford careers for the flower of our laboring population, and would wonderfully stimulate industry and thrift. At present, a farm laborer has scarcely any opportunity of rising in the world, except by leaving the land for a large town, or for the United States, or one of our colonies. He may be industrious and steady all his life, and yet fail to better his condition, while the only prospect he has for his old age is the charity of the Poor Law and a pauper's grave. As a rule, therefore, he does not try to save even before he marries, when he might save if he had a sufficient motive. If he does save money, he will simply subsist on that, when he is too old to work, as long as it lasts, and simply give relief to the rate-payers. He regards parish charity as his right, and is not disposed to deny himself for no other purpose than that of securing a meager independence. At present, the best of the young laborers are deserting the rural districts, leaving the old, the infirm, and the drunken, behind; and, as education advances, this mischievous exodus will become more and more extensive, unless something is done to check it. It is to be remarked in this connection that the farm workman does not escape from the evils of our land system even when he becomes a townsman; for the rents of houses in our large towns



are forced up enormously by the practical monopoly in land for building sites, and by the land-jobbing that goes on.

Under all the circumstances above briefly noticed, it is not surprising that what with comprehensive brevity is termed the "Land Question" is receiving more and more attention among thoughtful men in town and country alike. Hitherto, all attempts to remedy the gigantic evils of the land system have been defeated by the landlords, who wield enormous power in the House of Commons, and entirely control the House of Lords. The farmers have been feebly agitating against their grievances for many years, with no result worth mentioning. They are so much divided against themselves, and for the most part so entirely under the thumbs of their landlords, that they never combine effectively. Chambers of agriculture, established many years ago for the discussion of questions of agricultural politics, are largely controlled by landlords, and there is only one farmers' association of any importance which represents the advanced and independent tenant-farmers. This is the Farmers' Alliance, founded in 1879, and one of the best-abused institutions in the country. The objects of the association, as given in its published programme, are as follows :

1. To secure the better representation of tenant-farmers in Parliament.
2. To stimulate the improved cultivation of the land, especially by obtaining security for the capital of tenants invested in the improvement of their holdings.
3. To promote the reform of Laws relating to the Ownership and Transfer of Land.
4. To encourage greater freedom in the cultivation of the soil and the disposal of its produce.
5. To obtain the abolition of class privileges involved in the Law of Distress.
6. To promote the further reform of the Game Laws.
7. To obtain the alteration of all legal presumptions which operate unfairly against tenant-farmers.
8. To secure to rate-payers their legitimate share in county government.
9. To obtain a fair apportionment of local burdens between landlord and tenant.
10. To obtain the redemption of the land from the burden of extraordinary tithe charges, and the re-adjustment of ordinary tithes.
11. To watch over the interests of farmers in connection with railway charges.
12. The maintenance of effective regulations in respect of cattle disease.

This is a very moderate programme, as the most bitter foes of the Alliance are constrained to admit; but every one of the objects upon it meets with strong opposition whenever it is brought forward in Parliament, though not always from the same section of politicians. Not one of the objects has been fully realized, though some attention has been paid to a few.

The most satisfactory reform aimed at by the Alliance, and to a great extent promoted by it, was the framing of the Ground Game Act, which, however, is not in all respects satisfactory. The Settled Land Act does not at all satisfy the Alliance, and the Agricultural Holdings Act of last session, to be considered in detail presently, is entirely unsatisfactory. The latter measure, besides pretending to give tenants security for their improvements, dealt also with the Law of Distress, but in a very imperfect manner. It is difficult to legislate upon the question of freedom of cultivation and sale of produce; but the Alliance proposed to settle the difficulty by prohibiting all penalties upon the infringement of covenants as to cropping and sale, except when damages could be proved. A County Government Bill for next session is talked of, and, when local taxation comes to be dealt with, rates in England will probably be divided between landlord and tenant, as they are already in Scotland. Extraordinary tithes will not long remain, as their injustice is very generally admitted. Ordinary tithes will last till the Church is disestablished, when they will probably be used for national purposes, after life interests have been fairly provided for; but the demand of the Alliance is that tithes should be levied directly upon landlords, who in reality pay them at present, apart from fluctuation, as the tithe on a farm is reckoned by a tenant as so much rent. The charges made by railway companies for the conveyance of farm produce are in many cases beyond the limits fixed by the acts of Parliament under which the companies were incorporated. This is a burning question here, as it is in the United States. British farmers, however, have a grievance against railway companies which American farmers have not. Owing to competition among the companies, through rates from foreign countries to our great commercial centers are very low—much lower in proportion to distance than the rates charged for home produce. Indeed, the rates for foreign agricultural produce from a port to the metropolis, for instance, are in many cases less than the rates on the same kinds of English produce from a station half way between the port and the metropolis on the same railway. Thus English producers are handicapped, to the advantage of foreign producers, and the Farmers' Alliance has rendered good service to farmers by bringing this question before Parliament. Upon the question of cattle-disease regulations there is great unanimity

among landowners and farmers. At present, we admit cattle from countries in which infectious disease exists, slaughtering the animals at our ports. Up to the present time the regulations have kept out rinderpest and pleuro-pneumonia; but foot-and-mouth disease has been brought from the continent of Europe, and has caused the two most recent outbreaks of the disease in the United Kingdom. To get rid of the disease, the most complicated and vexatious restrictions are put by various local authorities upon the movements of live stock; and yet with very little effect, as the disease has spread over nearly all parts of the country. A strong agitation is now being made to induce the Government to close our ports against all live stock from countries in which infectious cattle disease exists, until those countries are free from the disease. The Government declare that they have not power under the Contagious Diseases (Animals) Act to adopt such a stringent course of action, and fresh legislation to give that power will probably be proposed next session. There will be great opposition to the proposal from the representatives of the towns, under the mistaken idea that the supply of meat will be reduced if the desired restrictions should be adopted. The fact is, however, that the losses from disease, and the prevention of breeding caused by the fear of disease, do more to keep down the supply of meat in this country than the total exclusion of the foreign supply would do. But no one asks that foreign meat should be excluded, and the present demand does not even go to the extent of the exclusion of all foreign live animals. In all probability it will be granted. If it should not be, the opponents of the demand, nearly all Liberals, will stand a very poor chance in the counties at the next general election.

This programme of the Farmers' Alliance, which I have briefly explained, so far as the objects are not self-explanatory, includes all the important demands made by British farmers. It is obvious that upon the attainment of the first object—the better representation of tenant-farmers in Parliament—the realization of those objects which are demanded of the Legislature in great measure depends; and, accordingly, at the present time efforts are being made by the Alliance to get farmers' candidates brought forward for county divisions. Already about forty members of the Alliance are in Parliament—not in most cases because they are members of the Alliance, however.

Most of these gentlemen are town representatives, whose sympathies are with the Alliance, but who care more for party than for agricultural reform. Some, however, are county men, who owe their seats chiefly to the efforts of the Alliance at the last general election, which took place less than a year after the association had been formed. At the next election the questions popularized by the Alliance will undoubtedly exercise great influence.

The space remaining at my disposal must be almost entirely devoted to the important question of Tenant Right, more than once alluded to in the preceding remarks. It will have been noticed that almost all the proposals for renovating British agriculture lead up to this question, as they must do in a country where nearly all the land is farmed by men who merely hire it, and that for the most part on yearly tenancy. The fact is, that the landlord-and-tenant system in relation to land is a thoroughly rotten one, and Americans may well be warned against the danger—the imminent danger, as it seems to me—of the extension of that system in their great country. Land should not be farmed by mere lodgers. Either the State should own all land, or the tillers of the soil should own the portion which they till. The cultivator puts his wealth, or his labor, which is the same thing, into the soil, and if the soil belongs to another man the properties of two men are irretrievably mixed up together. Thus there must be dual ownership in the soil, or the confiscation of one man's share by the other. The latter alternative has hitherto been adopted in Great Britain, and till recently it was the rule in Ireland also. Our landowners exclaim against dual ownership, as they naturally prefer the "good old plan" under which they have become wealthy; but it is as clear as noonday that the landlord-and-tenant system is only to be tolerated, consistently with justice, with a full recognition of dual ownership in the soil. But the question is not only, nor even mainly, one of justice between individuals; it is one of national expediency. Without a legal claim to compensation for his property in the soil, the tenant-farmer dares not do his best to develop the resources of the soil, and the nation suffers from an unnecessary poverty of agricultural production in consequence. Similarly, if there is any restriction upon the liberty of the tenant to improve his holding, all other people suffer more or less. Therefore, to render the landlord-and-tenant

system tolerable, in the interest of the public, tenants should have perfect freedom to improve the land and absolute security for their improvements. In Ireland a near approach has been made to this desirable consummation ; in England and Scotland we are very far from it. Our legislators have only nibbled at Tenant Right at present. Let us see how they have done it.

In 1875, the Conservative Government, ostensibly yielding to a demand made by farmers for about forty years, passed the first Agricultural Holdings Act for England. This measure, if it had been operative, would have secured tenants for a portion of their outlay upon a limited and specified number of improvements ; but as the Parliament of that day considerably allowed landlords to void the Act by simply giving notice to their tenants that they did not desire to come under it, nothing worth mentioning resulted from this remarkable legislative production. Of course, there was a great outcry at this ludicrous failure,—this mere sham of tenant-right legislation,—and to that outcry the majority of Liberal members lent a ready ear. At the general election they were profuse in their promises of what farmers might expect if the Liberal party were placed in power, and no one gave more assuring pledges than Mr. Gladstone himself. But when the time came for the introduction of a Tenants' Compensation bill, it was deemed injudicious to offend the Whig landlords and their numerous supporters in Parliament, and a measure, very little in advance of the abortive Act of 1875, was brought forward, made weaker in Committee, and weaker still in the House of Lords, and finally passed. It came into operation on the first day of the new year. This measure, known as the Agricultural Holdings Act, 1883, provides compensation for specified improvements made by tenants, which they can demand when they quit their holdings ; but it is so fenced about with restrictions and means of evasion that it is not likely to have much effect, except to give work to lawyers, who have been very busy during the past autumn in preparing agreements to enable landlords to evade the Act as far as possible. The principle of compensation as originally laid down in the Act is that of payment to the extent of the value of the improvements to an incoming tenant ; but from this, in accordance with an amendment timidly accepted by the Government, there is to be deducted anything "due to the inherent capabilities of the soil," an unknown quantity

which valuers cannot even approximately estimate. Improvements are divided into three classes. In order to have a claim for compensation for any of the improvements of the first class, including building, the laying down of permanent pasture, the planting of fruit-trees or hops, the reclamation of waste land, and other improvements of a permanent character, the tenant must obtain the written consent of his landlord before executing them. As this consent is certain to be refused in the vast majority of instances, the Act will be nugatory in respect of some of the most desirable of improvements. Permanent pasture is necessary on many farms, in order to enable tenants to pay their way; and yet if they make any without their landlord's consent, they will not be entitled to a penny of compensation, even if they should have to quit their farms before they have realized any advantage from their heavy outlay. The increase of fruit culture is still more desirable, and yet it is far too costly to plant fruit-trees without security. As to waste land, it is simply abominable that it should remain uncultivated because its owners will not expend the necessary capital, and tenants dare not, as they have no security for the outlay. The authors of the Act declared that it would be trenching upon the principle of ownership to allow tenants to carry out and claim compensation for such improvements as these without the permission of their landlords. But if the latter only had to pay for value received, where would be the injustice? The law of England, in theory, does not recognize absolute ownership in land. All land is the property of the Crown, and the nominal owners merely "hold an estate" in it. They are stewards of the national property, the land, which is essential to the existence of the people in their native country. It is therefore a gross exaggeration of the privileges of such nominal ownership to assume that landlords have a right to refuse to develop the resources of the soil, or to allow any one else to do so. The public interest demands that all possible encouragement should be given to men who are willing to invest capital in the land; and that encouragement can only be given by making the capital, or its fruits, secure to those who employ it. The complete ignoring of this public interest in Tenant Right has spoilt the Agricultural Holdings Act.

Draining is the only improvement in the second division. In order to possess a claim to compensation for draining, a tenant

must give a specified notice to his landlord that he intends to drain a certain piece of land ; then the landlord may elect to do the work himself, charging the tenant interest on the outlay ; or he may refuse to do it, and the tenant may then drain the land. This arrangement is plausible at first sight ; but as a large majority of tenants in England farm under a yearly tenancy, a notice of intention to drain land will probably be usually met with a six months' notice to quit. At any rate, the threat of such a notice will be a very simple and effectual expedient for a landlord who does not wish to be liable to pay compensation for draining, to resort to.

With respect to the first and second classes of improvements, even if a tenant is allowed to execute any of them, his landlord and he may make any terms "as to compensation or otherwise." As the tenant in this country does not contract on equal terms with his landlord in the case of any farm worth having, the chances of equitable arrangements as to compensation are so small that the Act is certain to be nearly a dead letter in respect of these classes of improvements.

The third class of improvements comprises manuring with purchased manures, liming, boning, chalking, marling, clay-burning, and the consumption by cattle, sheep, and pigs of purchased feeding-stuffs. Here we get to a nominal application of the compulsory principle as respects compensation ; for a landlord can only contract out of this part of the Act by agreeing with his tenant as to "fair and reasonable compensation." But the weak point in this arrangement is that there is no test in the Act as to what "fair and reasonable compensation" is, and the power of landlords is so great that they will, in most cases, be able to induce their tenants to sign bogus agreements as to compensation for any improvements of the third class that the latter may be disposed to make. It is true that a tenant who has made improvements for which his agreement does not provide adequate compensation, will be entitled to go to a court of law when he quits his holding to plead that, although he signed an agreement declaring that he accepted its terms as affording fair and reasonable compensation, it did not really secure to him all that the Act entitles him to claim ; but very few tenants will thus go back on their own agreements, and it is doubtful whether the courts would help them if they should take the course indicated.

When a tenant is allowed to claim compensation under the Act, the matter will be settled by two arbitrators, one appointed by the landlord and the other by the tenant, with an umpire, if necessary; but the general opinion is that the Act will be to a very great extent set aside by means of private agreements.

Great discontent is felt at the omission of the Act to give protection to sitting tenants against having their rents raised on their own improvements. This has been by far the most common method of confiscating tenants' property. A man who has raised the condition of his holding to a high state of fertility is naturally reluctant to leave it, and he is therefore often constrained to submit to the injustice of being rented on his own improvements rather than give up his home and his farm. Under the Act, it is only by giving notice to quit that he can even partially protect himself against robbery, and it has already been shown that he cannot expect full compensation if he has made many improvements, even if he does quit his holding.

The Act has reduced the landlord's power of distraint from a claim for six years' rent to a claim for only one year's rent, and it exempts from seizure the property of third parties, as, for instance, live stock sent to graze for a few weeks. This alteration, however, will not affect the rent-raising incidence of the Law of Distress, as a preference claim to one year's rent will be ample security for a landlord who accepts a "man of straw" for a tenant, tempted by the offer of a high rent. The alteration, moreover, will reduce the tenant's credit with his landlord, without appreciably increasing it with other capitalists, and distraints will certainly be far more common than they have ever been before. Landlords, as a rule, have been very forbearing in the use of the monstrous powers given to them by the Law of Distress; but now they will be likely to press their tenants when the latter are in arrear with a single year's rent, as their preference security will be exhausted. The Law of Distress should have been abolished altogether, as its equivalent, the Law of Hypothec, has been in Scotland.

These are the principal features of the Agricultural Holdings Act for England, and a similar measure has been passed for Scotland. The members of the Farmers' Alliance in both countries are thoroughly dissatisfied with the measures, which fall far short of proposals made by themselves. An amending bill is to be introduced next session by Mr. James Howard, formerly



president of the Alliance, and one of its founders; but there is no chance of the acceptance of the bill by the present Parliament. The extension of the franchise to the farm laborers, which is expected to take place this year, will greatly improve the chances of agricultural reformers.

Two proposals for land-tenure reform, not yet mentioned, deserve notice. The first, which is not likely to be realized, is Mr. Jesse Collings's scheme for settling farm laborers on the land as peasant-proprietors with the aid of State funds. The second is of far greater importance, and is likely to exercise a very important influence upon the politics of the future. I refer to the nationalization of the land, rendered very popular among our working classes especially by the wide circulation of Mr. Henry George's "*Progress and Poverty*" and Mr. Alfred Russel Wallace's "*Land Nationalization*." Mr. George's arguments are exceedingly powerful, though some of his statements are greatly exaggerated, and his political economy is shaky; but his practical scheme is in all respects as bad as it could possibly be. In the first place, it would be a gross injustice to take the land without compensating existing owners; and in the second place, to tax the land up to within ten per cent. of its letting value and still to leave owners to do what they can with it, would lead to such extremes of rack-renting as would ruin agriculture altogether. Mr. Wallace's scheme is a very different one. He would value the bare land, apart from improvements and buildings, pay the annual value of the bare land to owners and the last of their living heirs for life, take the same annual value from the occupiers of the land as rent, and give the latter fixity of tenure and the power of selling their Tenant Right, including all improvements. When owner and tenant are both entitled to some of the improvements, one would have to buy the other out. The present owners might hold as much land as they chose to occupy, paying rent to the State; but subletting would be forbidden. Rents would be revalued at fixed intervals, so as to take the "unearned increment" for the State, but not to touch improvements. The general effect of the scheme would be to give the three F's to the occupiers of land, and to make the State the sole landlord. There would be no risk of loss to the State, unless the value of the whole land of the country should diminish—an exceedingly unlikely contingency, especially as ground rents in towns would be nationalized as well as agricult-

ural rents. This scheme has been utterly misrepresented by all its adverse critics. The chief ground of objection taken is the alleged expense of State superintendence; but there would not be any more expense in collecting the quit-rent on the land than in collecting an ordinary land or income tax. One thing is certain: if the land in this country ever should be nationalized, landowners will be fairly dealt with. As to the compensation to landlords, some say it is too much, and others that it is too little. Of course, the difficulty of carrying the scheme into effect would be enormous, and for that reason, if for no other, the proposal is not yet within the region of practical politics; but if our landlords continue to oppose the most moderate reforms of our land system, as they have done hitherto, public indignation will some day force a sweeping measure through Parliament.

WILLIAM E. BEAR.